FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Seventh and Cushman Streets, Fairbanks, Alaska

July 15, 1942

R. Rolland Armstrong, Minister

REPORT ON ALASKAN SITUATION FROM VIEWPOINT OF

A PRESBYTERIAN IN THE HEART OF THE INTERIOR.

The last few weeks has seen military convulsions throughout the Territory. No one will say what is going on. Even if we did know it is our rightful duty to remain silent. A heavy censorship has fallen over the entire situation. From the viewpoint of the military this is what will win the war. To the thinking and conscious civilian a touch of rebellion marks the imposed banning of information.

There are two results of this censhorship. One is the trek to the "outside". This means the complete disruption of home ties. Families normally steady and entrenched are rooted up with the thought of separation "for the duration." Herein lies an enormous breakdown in the church program. No community can lose children, wives and some of its young people without seeing leadership and scholars depleted. The church must then be ready to foster movements and courses to meet this changing need. (How we are meeting this is discussed later).

Second in the results of the censhorship is a deepening determination to remain at the palisade. Thoughtful and deliberate in their decision many are being drawn closer together in homes and work. It is well that as yet rationing has not come to this area. Conscious that the possibility of it is ahead, whole families are gardening, picking berries, canning and preparing places of storage for vegetables. Common effort inspires closer association. This in turn is the factor that the church has prayed for and under these mysterious circumstances has come forth.

This particular congregation saw well in advance that the change was due to take a certain toll on its church school and congregation. Viewing the situation as a challenge they adjusted their educational program. The first suggestion was to keep the crowd looking large. Combine and arouse interest without sacrifice to grated teaching and learning. Immediately department worship services were combined. Classes were brought together. The forced reduction in the staff found us with steady, spiritual and eager workers in the harness. With the reduction of attendance there has been no loss of morale. The teachers are thrilled with the attitude of the children and they find an increased interest in the work of the school.

One other item might be raised in connection with the church in Alaska today. (Let me limit that to Fairbanks.) If the subscription list of the church were published over against the folk who have gone outside, it would show that most of the subscribers are here.

The social condition finds Fairbanks with a high per capita wealth. Wages are high and everyone is working. Positions at the local base have employed many

town folk. Contract jobs on projects have taken high school, college and older men.

The possibility of good jobs and big money has drawn Indian and Eskimo men and families into this area. It is a source of much trouble because the class distinction is becoming stronger each month. Many of the natives are drinking. Women are soliciting civilians and soldiers and cause trouble in the tracing of centers of disease.

Let me add to this that the soldiers from the field are most interested in the church. To date a second chaplain arrived. This gives one Protestant (Baptist) and Roman Catholic on duty. The U. S. O. has opened their doors within the last month. They have fine equipment and excellent directors.

I am at the eve of going on a 4-H encampment. Some 50 children will be there. Mrs. Armstrong will be camp cook and I will be the general-pusher-arounder-settle-the disputter. In other words the recreational director.

NOTE: I have written without the thought of correction. I'll leave that up to you if it is too bad.

NORTHERN LIGHT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WILLIS R. BOOTH, Minister

JUNEAU, ALASKA

July 17, 1942

Mrs. H. R. McEwen
Board of National Missions
156 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. McEwen:

Everything possible is being done for the comfort of the boys in the Service. This week, there is being conducted a financial drive for the U. S. O. to be established in Juneau. A building has been selected and will very soon be conditioned.

Meanwhile, the American Legion Hall is being used as a place of amusement. All the churches and fraternal organizations are co-operating by each organization having the supervision for one week. During the week, a hostess, cookies and coffee are provided. The men are making good use of the opportunity in their patronage. Of course, the homes of the community are open to them and they are invited to meals.

There is no chaplain here thus far. The men are privileged to attend the Churches. Though the percentage of those who attend is small at present, it seems to be growing.

As contact representative for the Board of National Missions, the Governor of Aslaska has promised me the fullest co-operation of the Alaska War Council in respect to any possible emergency necessity concerning our missionaries. Such information coming to me from the Council can and will be readily and quickly transmitted to the missionaries.

The war situation is having its effect upon the Church. Juneau has had many people leave. The loss in this Church is noticeable. Yet, in spite of that fact, the attendance is growing and has astounded the eldership. Since coming to Juneau, November 15, 1941, thirty-eight new members have been aded to the roll. Twenty-two of whom were upon profession of faith. Last Sunday, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered to a very large congregation. This was the first summer Communion Service held in this Church in several years. Twenty-five soldiers were present.

The Sunday School has suffered most. It is shot to pieces during the summer months. But that always happens as so many families move to the Auke Bay region for the summer. However, many of the children have been taken to the States this summer.

Cordially yours,

(Signed) Willis R. Booth

Willis R. Booth

METLAKATLA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ALFRED D. SWOGGER, Pastor

METLAKATLA, ALASKA

July 24, 1942

Office of Dr. King
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. McEwen:

Regarding the defense situation in this district, I feel that all is being done that can be done to provide for the safety of the people. Of course there is all the movement that would be expected about a Flying Field in the immediate district.

A number of our men are working at the Base, which, I feel tends to make the two communities one in a way. There does not seem to be the concern for their safety which seems to be felt in some places.

This is an Indian community almost 100%, and the presence of white faces and uniforms does seem to disturb many of our young girls. In fact, the social situation is very disturbing, and seems to be a difficult one for which to find a solution. Amount our young people, I would say the religious situation is becoming a grave one. The lack of home discipline and the thrill of new adventures are contributing factors to the social and religious let down so manifest among our young people, especially the young girls.

The older people, and I mean people above the -teen age, are showing more interest in that which has to do with the Church.

The situation as it exists now is a most difficult one, but I have faith to believe that better days are ahead for the Minister who will put forth his best for the Master.

Cordially yours,

(Signed) Alfred D. Swogger

Alfred D. Swogger

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DAVID H. CRAWFORD, MINISTER

CORDOVA, ALASKA

July 25, 1942

Mrs. H. R. McEwen
% Dr. Everett B. King
Board of National Missions
156 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. McEwen:

We have some military stationed here. The nature and extent of same I will not mention. This, of course, means an increase in the number who desire the use of the Church. In fact they have responded very well to our services. They have, to a great extent, supplemented the number that have moved out and also the number that are tied up with defense work and working conditions that have hindered them from coming to the services. Our boys in both Army and Navy appreciate the Church. Duties keep them from attending our services many times but a good percentage come when they can. The work of the Church with these boys is of gravest importance to my mind. I am of the opinion that the future of the church in Alaska depends upon the way in which the present church of Alaska treats these boys who are now in Alaska. I am suprised at the number of boys here who plan within the 10 years following the war of coming back to the territory and making this their home. If such is the case, then the changes that must take place in the moral life of the territory must be impressed upon the minds of these boys. This is one of the phases of our work here. Another phase that I meet every day is that personal contact that has to be made with the boys. As time moves along this phase of our work is increasing. The boys are sensing the need of help and counsel and many come to me. The Chaplain gets a lot of this work, however, many times the boys feel as though they would rather have the minister of the town Church talk with them than their Chaplain. This is not minimizing the work of the Chaplain a bit. It is rather bolstering his work. For they find the same kind of counsel from both and often this repeated counsel is what they need. I try to help the Chaplain and he helps us. The tie between home Church and the boy in the Army is certainly needed. If pastors could drop a personal note to the boy away at camp, it would help so much. At the same time if they could be reminded to remember their church while at camp it would be an added aid. Many of these boys are lonely and the Church can go a long ways in filling the vacancy that they miss. This is our program we try to maintain for these boys. Our church, our homes and our facilities are all open to them. And let me add, it is certainly appreciated.

Cordially yours,

(Signed) David H. Crawford

C O P Y

Hoonah, Alaska
July 25th. '42

Dr. E. B. King
156 5th Ave. N. Y.

Dear Dr. King:-

Here at Hoonah we have not been effected yet and may not be in the future. Our people are now in the midst of the season's salmon fishing doing all they can to assure a large pack this season.

The people evacuated from three villages in the Aleutian Islands have been given temporary homes in this section of Southeast Alaska. About four hundred from the Pribilof Islands are at Funter Bay, housed in the cannery and mining buildings there. They brought their personal effects with them, and a Government Agent and two Priests of the Russian Church are with them. The nurse from Hoonah is there at present helping to control and establish health and sanitary measures.

Some eighty five people from Atka Island are at the old village of Killisnoo, about three miles from Angoon. These people were taken out by airplane and could bring very little with them. Our people at Angoon and Kake donated clothing and food when they first arrived. They are repairing the old buildings and building new in preparation for the coming winter.

Sincerely,

(Signed) E. E. Bromley

E. E. Bromley

Palmer, Alaska

Military and Defense Situation in and around Palmer

All Alaska is considered "theater of war area" and that includes the Matanuska Valley. We are so near the Army that we see men in uniform, but so far away that we would not know that there is a war if we did not have radios. The valley has no military installations, yet a good number of the men from the farms here are away working on defense jobs. Naturally there is a local organization of the territorial guard here, comparable to our national guard units in the States. But differing in the facts that all the members of the local guard are non-military age men and could not serve in a branch of the armed forces.

The greatest effect of the situation upon the work of the church is its lowering attendance at services. The men who are away at work have left the family at home without transportation and as a result the family is absent from the regular services of the church. Most of the members are faithfully paying their church pledges and expect the pastor to continue his calling which is done regularly.

The reported effects of extreme increase or decrease in church interest is totalling lacking here. Our members generally accept the situation and continue their daily routine work. Those who were not in attendance have not become suddenly interested in the church. There was anxiety and some families returned to the States on the outbreak of war but those who try to continue a normal life here are doing so with seeming satisfactory results.

While the war was only a few months old we had many rumors but now we have little or no rumor-mongering. One might sum the situation up by comparing it to any rural community in the States, considering its population and nearness or separation from army posts and industry.

O. Wilber Randall, Pastor

HAINES HOUSE
Haines, Alaska
Owned and operated by
Board of National Missions
of the
Presbyterian Church in the United States of America

Edwin E. Knudsen, Executive

Sept. 10, 1942

Phylis B. McEwen
156 5th Ave.
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. McEwen:

A reminder from Dr. King that I owe you this letter just came and I must say I am sorry not to have replied sooner. Your request came while I was in the midst of "Haying" and filling silo, and thencompletely forgotten.

This being a defense area there is little I could say as to our present situation from a military standpoint. However, our Church is trying in every way to be of assistance spiritually to these men. Bible classes and fellowship hours are held at the Manse Sunday evening and during the week as conditions permit. The Church locally has been handicapped considerably due to the evacuation of civilian families of men employed at the barracks. In fact, if it were not for Haines House we would have no Sunday School teachers or leaders of religion in the church. Occasionally there is a soldier that has the training and willingness to help and we always welcome them into our program.

The greatest evil we have to combat is that of liquor. It flows very freely in our Community and is a great problem. We receive no cooperation from the Command and I imagine this is the only Post where religious services are not welcomed. This was a winter and summer condition. Just what will come with the fall no one knows. The Church is ready to serve whenever the opportunity presents itself.

I'm sorry I cannot give you more detail but this is wartime. I must say some of the conditions have changed and we look forward to the challenge of the new for a closer fellowship in service.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Edwin E. Knudsen

September 15, 1942

The Effect of the Defense and Military Situation upon the Work of the Ketchikan Mission Church.

Perhaps the most direct way the present situation has made itself felt upon our work here has been through the loss of influential men from the congregation. Usually our men are absent in the summer but here throughout the rest of the year. Now, with so much work going on, most of it away from Ketchikan, they are being kept out of town continually. Two of our elders, the choir director, and some other key men have already made arrangements to be away for many months.

A feeling of general insecurity and unrest prevails here. It is not expressed in words so much as in the refusal to accept any continuing responsibility or make any committments for the future months. "Morale " itself is good, but underlying all is the ever-present expectation of change.

Here in Ketchikan a large and well equipped USO center is maintained. It provides a splendid social schedule, and recreational program. However, there is little or no effort made to touch upon spiritual needs. And because of the denominational issue, a regular organized attempt may not be made by anyone outside of the organization. Efforts to interest the men by a coffee club--Sunday morning coffee and donuts in the building, thence to church--any church--have failed. But very few at a time are given liberty or leave, thus there are never very many in town at one time. I have made contacts with as many men as possible, have had occasional small delegations at services, and fairly frequent callers from the armed forces. But all in all I regret to report that I do not feel that we, this church, are a particularly vital force among the military men. One reason for this might be that the men have been given to feel by other sources that this is a "native church", and as such not suitable for them. This does seem to be the case, and is an effective barrier to some at least.

This in general is the situation here. It seems that I have mentioned only difficulties, and in truth I can see no particular advantages in the present state of affairs. Yet we are not by any means weighted down or inordinately discouraged by difficulties. We accept them only to endeavor to go on the more strongly because of them. May we be so led that His strength and His spirit may be ours and our people's.

(Signed) James W. Hall.